

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
17 August 1985

A SOBERING TRIP THROUGH THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY
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In 1981, Martin Miller discovered by chance that there is a serious mistake in U.S. government publications about the legal ownership of the West Bank, occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war by Israel.

The discovery led him on a four-year odyssey through the snail-like workings of the federal bureaucracy that left Miller a lot more cynical about the government he used to work for.

Miller, a retired Treasury Department employee, found U.S. publications gave ownership of the 2,200-mile-square area to Jordan, but Jordan's 1950 annexation of the West Bank is not recognized by any government except Britain and Pakistan. In 1974, even Jordan gave up its own claim to the area at the Rabat conference.

The United States considers the area to be occupied territory, the ownership to be determined by negotiation, but the U.S. maps don't reflect this. The area is shown on U.S. maps to be an occupied part of Jordan, something that even Jordan does not now claim.

Miller, filled with confidence in the essential goodness of the U.S. government, pointed out the cartographic mistake in a polite letter and even had it brought up in public at the State Department daily press briefing.

Miller received a letter from the State Department geographer saying the department would tell all government publications that the West Bank is not under the sovereignty of any Middle East country (including Jordan).

Two years later, Miller trudged from the State Department to Capitol Hill to the Central Intelligence Agency. The State Department announced that the mistaken map would be changed in the next edition of the "World Factbook," which is published by the CIA, under the policy direction of the State Department.

The map was corrected, but the accompanying text was still wrong, giving back to Jordan what the map took away.

The matter was brought up at the State Department Press briefing, and spokesman John Hughes, whose Public Affairs branch is in charge of the subject, promised that something would be done.

In fact, nothing was done.

Miller then called in one of his big IOUs, a casual friendship with George Shultz, now secretary of state, but head of the Treasury when Miller was pushing defense bonds.

Shultz agreed to see Miller, who quickly explained the story to Shultz in his seventh-floor office. Shultz promised quick action.

Another year passed and Miller, carrying a briefcase full of letters, maps, books, and promises, went from the CIA to Capitol Hill and back to the State Department.

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At the CIA, he was told by CIA spokesman Patti Volz that the agency has no intention of 'revising, replacing or changing maps of Jordan published by the U.S. government at this point in time.'

Miller wondered aloud if the rest of CIA intelligence is as accurate as its maps of the Middle East.

This year, Miller, lifelong bureaucrat and believer in the system, decided to take his case elsewhere.

Since all U.S. map publishers rely heavily on U.S. government definitions of borders, and since the government definitions of the West Bank borders are wrong, he went directly to such publishers as the National Geographic, Macmillan and others.

He pointed out that the U.S. government publications are either wrong, inconsistent, or both and suggested that the map and atlas publishers ignore their own government and follow the facts. Some publishers followed his advice; others didn't.

The National Geographic played it right down the middle. In their aerial map of Jordan in February, 1984, they got it wrong. But in a bird's-eye map of Israel in July, 1985, they got it right.

The State Department, after more than four years of ignoring Miller and his retirement obsession, finally put together a new "Background Paper" on Jordan, which is to be published later this summer. For the first time, both the maps and the text are correct.

Thus, it was possible to compute that it took 18 months for a direct order from the secretary of state, who promised Miller action in April, 1984, to filter down to the actual working levels of the department and actually take effect.

There is no indication how long it will take the CIA to follow the State Department policy guidance in its publications.

Miller -- after countless letters, interviews and telephone calls - is not elated as the final episode closed. He is older, somewhat wiser about his quixotic mission, and a lot more cynical about the government he used to work for.